

IN BRIEF

LAUGHING GULL *LARUS ATRICILLA* AND FRANKLIN'S GULL
L. PIPIXCAN IN THE ECUADORIAN ANDES

On the morning of 20 November 1991 I was watching a flock of Andean Gulls *Larus serranus* circling at the northern end of Lago de Colta, near Santiago de Quito, Prov. Chimborazo, Ecuador (elev. c. 3250 m). At 08.00 I noticed a roughly similar-sized but much darker gull in the area, which was identified as a Laughing Gull *L. atricilla* and appeared to be in second-winter plumage. The bird was observed in flight for about 2 minutes and came as close as 30 m, where I could photograph it (Fig. 1). Again on the same day, at 16.00, I watched an adult winter and five first-winter Franklin's Gulls *L. pipixcan* with 27 Andean Gulls in the highlands (c. 3100 m) 10 km south of Cañar, Prov. Cañar, Ecuador. These birds were initially feeding and resting in a freshly ploughed field. After 10 minutes they flew to a small reservoir, where I could photograph some of them (photographs in Editor's files).

These are the first records of Laughing Gull and Franklin's Gull for the Ecuadorian Andes (cf. Fjeldså & Krabbe 1990, *Birds of the High Andes*, Ortiz Crespo *et al.* 1990, *Aves del Ecuador*, Fernando I. Ortiz Crespo *in litt.*, Robert S. Ridgely *in litt.*). The Laughing Gull is a common migrant along the Ecuadorian coast (Ben Haase *in litt.*), being a non-breeding visitor along the northern half of the Pacific coast of South America, in very small numbers down to southwestern Peru (Hughes 1988, *Bull. Brit. Orn. Cl.* 108: 29–43). The first Laughing Gull record for Chile was also established in November 1991 (Hoogendoorn 1993, *Amer. Birds* 47: 156–158).

The species is irregular to rare far inland beyond its regular coastal range in the Americas, and indeed every interior record is noteworthy (for South America e.g. Tallman & Tallman 1977, *Rev. Univ. Católica, Quito* 5: 217–224; Pearson 1980, in A. Keast and E. S. Morton (eds), *Migrant Birds in the Neotropics*: 273–283). Anywhere else where it has occurred as a vagrant, e.g. in Europe, North and West Africa, and Australia, it is almost exclusively coastal (Hoogendoorn & Steinhaus 1990, *Dutch Birding* 12: 109–164).

Probably the highest-in-elevation Laughing Gull ever recorded in North America is a bird observed at Aurora, Colorado, at 1680 m elevation, on 2–15 February 1986 (Prather 1986, *Colorado Field Orn.* 7: 20: 27–33, Hugh E. Kingery *in litt.*). In South America, a Laughing Gull in the eastern Andes of Colombia at 3020 m elevation appears to be the highest recorded (Hilty & Brown 1986, *A Guide to the Birds of Colombia*, Fjeldså & Krabbe 1990, J. Fjeldså and S. L. Hilty *in litt.*). The original source of this record could not be traced. Apparently, the Lago de Colta bird marks a new record for elevation for the species, and the southernmost far inland occurrence in South America.

Franklin's Gull is an abundant migrant along the Ecuadorian coast of Prov. Guayas (Ben Haase pers. comm.; pers. obs.), and is a non-breeding visitor along the Pacific coast of South America, down to southern Chile (Araya Mödinger *et al.* 1986, *Guia de campo de las aves de Chile*). As an inland and high-altitude record the Cañar observation

cannot be considered as exceptional, as the species occurs occasionally at considerable distances inland and at high elevations elsewhere in South America; but it appears to be the northernmost Andean record. It has been recorded from the Andes of Peru and Bolivia (Plenge 1974, *Condor* 76: 326–330; Hughes 1977, *Biotropica* 9: 52; Remsen & Ridgely 1980, *Condor* 82: 69–75; Harris 1980, *Publ. Mus. Hist. Nat. "Javier Prado"*, *Zool., Ser. A* 27: 1–14, Fjeldså 1983, *Steenstrupia* 8: 285–298; Fjeldså 1988, *Bol. Lima* 58: 61–68; Hughes 1988), in trans-Andean Peru (Schulenberg 1980, *Gerfaut* 70: 403–404), in the Central Valley of Chile near Santiago (Carlos G. Guerra Correa pers. comm.), and in Prov. Córdoba in central Argentina (Nores & Yzurieta 1979, *Hornero* 12: 45–52; Olrog 1979, *Opera Lilloana* 27: 1–324; Nores *et al.* 1983, *Bol. Acad. Nac. Cienc., Córdoba* 56: I–IX, 1–114), sometimes in flocks of hundreds or thousands. Elsewhere, Franklin's Gull has often shown its capacity as an inland wanderer, which is not surprising for an exclusively inland breeder. Thus in Europe there are inland records of vagrant individuals from Spain, France, Britain, Belgium, The Netherlands, Germany and Sweden (Hoogendoorn & Steinhaus 1990).

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Figure 1. Laughing Gull *Larus atricilla* in second-winter plumage, Lago de Colta (Santiago de Quito), Prov. Chimborazo, Ecuador, elev. c. 3250 m, 20 November 1991.

WHERE ARE THE LIMITS OF THE WESTERN PALEARCTIC?

The Palearctic is a natural continuum. Nonetheless, the term 'Western Palearctic' is in common usage (e.g. in popular ornithological journals) and it is therefore helpful to consider the most appropriate definition of this sub-region. The editorial statement in *Birds of the Western Palearctic* (Vol. 1), that the definition of the eastern limits of the western part of the Palearctic is "largely arbitrary", has received little subsequent attention. In the southeast, renewed examination of the most appropriate 'limits' in Iran and the Arabian peninsula is, therefore, worthwhile.

While the need for greater recognition of the distinctiveness of the Saharo-Sindian zone avifauna (Harrison 1986, *Atlas of the Birds of the*